

### **Michigan Firefighter Charged in Traffic Deaths**

Michigan firefighter has been charged in the traffic deaths of a Traverse City-area woman and her eleven-month-old son. Firefighter Cory Carlton of the Grand Traverse Metro Fire Department was arraigned Thursday on two counts of negligent homicide. Firefighter Carlton was responding to a chimney fire back in March when the fire apparatus he was driving collided with a sport utility vehicle. Rebecca Garrisi and her son Jesse were killed in the accident. Rebecca Garrisi's husband Matthew, who was driving the S-U-V, was seriously injured. The 26-year-old Carlton is free on bond. He faces up to two years in jail. Firefighter Carlton was his battalion's safety officer when the crash occurred, according to court files.

Antrim County Prosecutor Charles Koop authorized the charges. Sheriff's investigators said it appeared Carlton went through a red light without slowing to check for oncoming traffic. Michigan law says emergency vehicles may proceed past a red light "only after slowing down as may be necessary for safe operation." A statement of probable cause against Carlton alleges he drove "without due regard" for the safety of others and operated the fire engine at an "immoderate" rate of speed in a "reckless manner."

Carlton's attorney, Roger Wotila, of Cadillac, said criminal charges aren't warranted. "It was an accident, and every accident is not a crime," Wotila said. "It was a tragedy, but not a criminal action." Carlton returned to work shortly after the crash but was banned from driving emergency equipment, Fire Chief Wayne Hanna said. Carlton will be suspended until the charges against him are resolved, Hanna said. Matthew Garrisi filed a civil suit against the fire department in June on behalf of his wife and son.

"We feel the proper forum is the civil lawsuit and do not believe a criminal charge is in any way warranted," said Wotila. But Traverse City attorney George Thompson, who represents Garrisi in the civil suit, said Carlton should have known that sirens alone would not adequately warn motorists. "It is clear that the risks associated with the way he was driving were unreasonable," said Thompson. "We admire these people for their service, but if they are not going to follow the rules and use reasonable judgment, something has to be done."

Thompson filed interrogatories that asked the county whether Carlton had been informed that his engine was not needed at the fire call before he reached South Airport Road, a contention the county denied as "not true," according to court records. Martin thinks the case could be a lesson for drivers of emergency services vehicles. "I really want it to be brought to the public's and lawmakers' attention that more schooling should be done for firemen," said Martin. "Getting to a fire a minute sooner and risking the possibility of killing someone isn't worth it."

This kind of case knocks the wind out of all of us for a variety of reasons...after all, the firefighter's intentions were good-he was responding with his crew to "help" someone....we have all been there, but then, a horribly tragic outcome.

There are numerous discussion points on this issue that we can all use at our firehouses. Here are some important links to help your FD minimize the potential:

[www.drivetosurvive.org](http://www.drivetosurvive.org)  
<http://wsfd.us/Higway%20Safety.htm>  
[www.ResponderSafety.com](http://www.ResponderSafety.com)  
[www.EmergencyVehicleResponse.com](http://www.EmergencyVehicleResponse.com)  
[www.emergencydispatch.org/articles/useoflights1.htm](http://www.emergencydispatch.org/articles/useoflights1.htm)  
[www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/cvvfa.pdf](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/cvvfa.pdf)  
[www.usfa.fema.gov/research/safety/vehicle.shtm](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/research/safety/vehicle.shtm)  
[www.caryems.com/training/driversInformation.html](http://www.caryems.com/training/driversInformation.html)  
[www.VFIS.com](http://www.VFIS.com)  
[www.ESIP.com](http://www.ESIP.com)

Please take a few minutes to review this incident, do some research to follow up, and use all of the above links to minimize the potential for the above tragedies to occur again.

\*\*\*\*\*ALSO-PLEASE NOTE: If you tried to order the free "10 Cones For Highway Safety" video program from: [www.ResponderSafety.com](http://www.ResponderSafety.com), and it didn't work, try it again-please go to:  
<http://www.respondersafety.com/downloads/videoform.html>